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Mpambanyoni: a Late Iron Age site on the Natal south coast

by

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SYNOPSIS

Rescue excavations at the hilltop site of Mpambanyoni, near Scottburgh, were carried out in the summer of 1978–79. Two shell middens were excavated and a number of surface pottery collections made. Analysis of the remains shows that the inhabitants depended for a large proportion of their meat on hunting, fishing and gathering of molluscs, especially the brown mussel *Perna perna*. No direct evidence of agriculture was found, although the large bovid remains are most probably those of domestic cattle, and the presence of grindstones and pottery in an Iron Age context suggests that agriculture was practised. Three radiocarbon dates centre around the beginning of the second millennium A.D., suggesting a similarity with the site of Blackburn, near Umhlanga Rocks.

INTRODUCTION

The archaeological site of Mpambanyoni lies approximately 2 km inland from the town of Scottburgh, on the Natal south coast (Fig. 1). It is situated on a steep-sided hilltop (Map reference S 30°17′21″: E 30°44′10″), overlooking the river at the old Renishaw sugar-mill, and has a view of the river mouth and the sea beyond. The hill has for many years been planted with sugar-cane, and ploughing has disturbed many of the shell middens which ring the hilltop, at the same time destroying any evidence of huts on the flatter summit, where the soil is

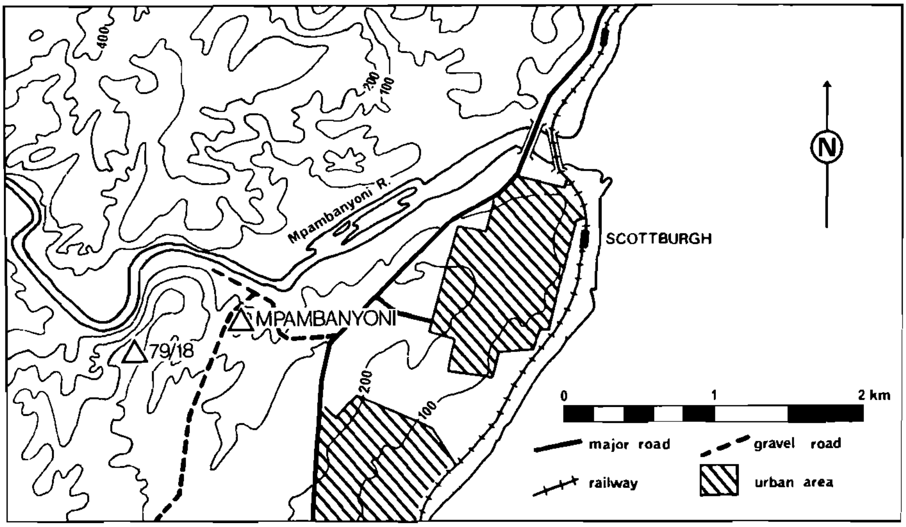

Fig. 1. Location of sites mentioned in the text.

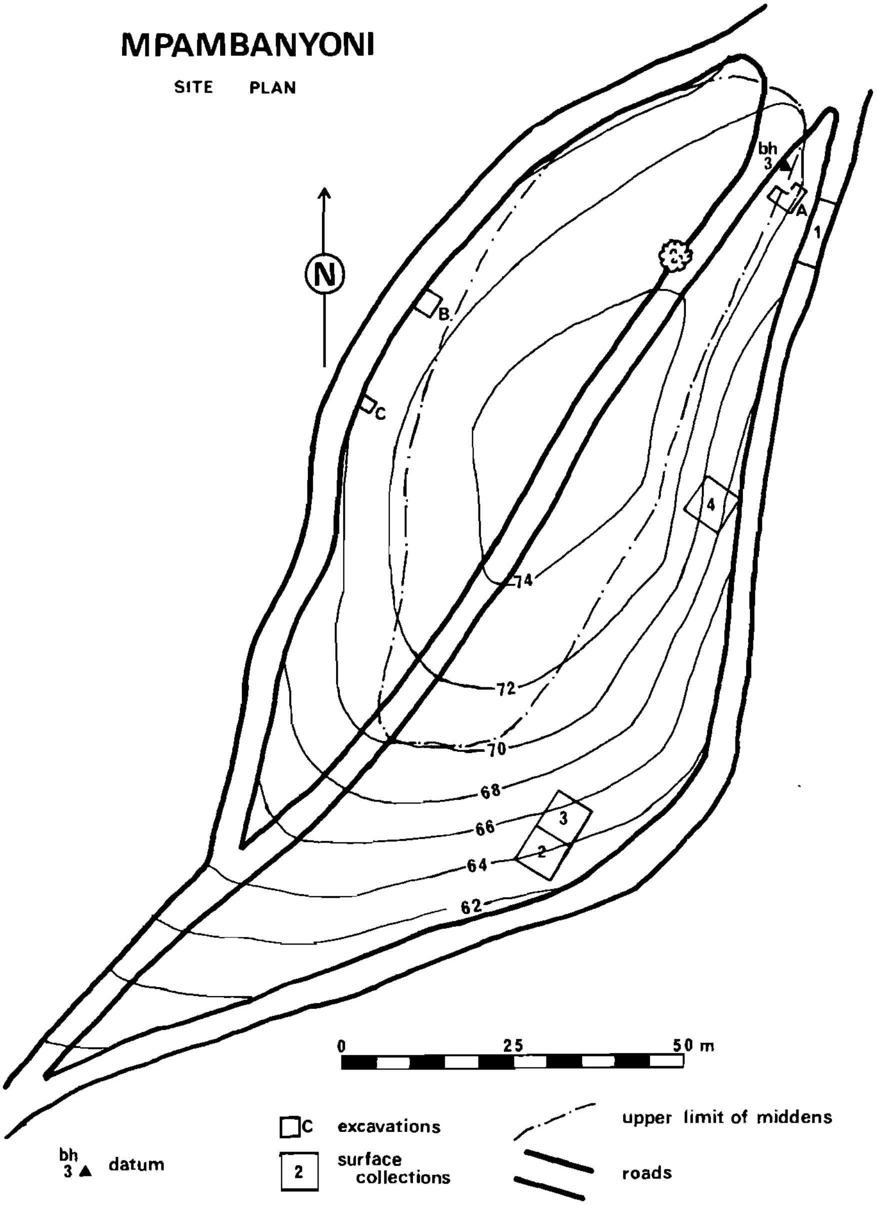

Fig. 2. Location of excavations and surface collections (contours in metres above sea level).

considerably shallower. Some middens have been exposed in section by two access roads which run around the slopes, while others are visible only through the cultural debris which has been turned up by the ploughing.

Geologically, the river forms the southern boundary of an outcrop of Ecca shales, while between the hill and the coast lies a belt of Table Mountain Sandstone. The hill itself forms the point of an arm of a large granite block which extends inland. Because it formed the nearest source of decomposed granite to the new highway (N2) which passes to the east of the site, the hill is now being used as a quarry by the Natal Roads Department and has been completely destroyed.

The natural vegetation of the area around Mpambanyoni is fairly typical Coastal Forest and Palm Veld (Moll, 1976), allowing for the disturbance caused by development, and falls within Acocks's (1975) category of Coastal Forest and Thornveld, with a canopy height of 10–20 m. Secondary growth of shrubs and weeds is probably the result of extensive clearance for sugar-cane fields. The forest still provides a variety of small game and with the near-by riverine vegetation would have provided rich hunting to the Iron Age people of the area. The coast is within a half-hour's walk along the river, which provides a year-round water supply.

THE SITE

Fieldwork was carried out over a three-week period in November 1978, with a further week in late January 1979. During the first period, I made three surface collections of pottery and excavated two distinct middens from opposite sides of the hill, taking from each 6 m^2 of the midden deposit, which varied between 15 and 55 cm in depth, and a slightly larger area of disturbed topsoil. During three days of excavation in January, a further 2 m^2 was taken from midden A to enlarge the faunal sample, as well as removing some more disturbed soil to partially expose the edge of the midden. Work was started on a third midden (C) but was abandoned in favour of removing the rich deposit from midden A. During the same week a further surface collection was made and a successful attempt was made to trace the upper limit of the midden zone by means of a series of radiating transects taken down the slopes of the hill. In addition a 10 m × 10 m surface pottery collection was made on a neighbouring site (unnamed, but designated 79/18) which contained a badly disturbed shell midden, but similar pottery.

Both middens excavated contained a single shell lens, which overflowed from distinct hollows in the decomposed bedrock (Figs 3, 4 & 6). Other exposed middens on the site appeared to have the same basic form, and one appeared to fill a narrow gully or ditch. These hollows may have been man-made excavations to remove the decomposed granite for building purposes, but there is no positive proof of this. Beneath the shell lens, lining the hollow in each case was a layer of dark soil, much like the overlying topsoil. In midden B, this lens was only some 5–6 cm deep in the hollow, increasing to some 10 cm beyond this, but in midden A it filled the hollow to a depth of over 25 cm in places. Midden A was exposed on the surface by sheet erosion at the edge of the cane-field, and midden B in a cutting made by the access road. The greater part of the latter midden was lost when this road was built.

Taking into account the broad stratigraphy outlined above the two shell lenses were dug in 10 cm spits as there was no visible stratigraphy within them. In midden A a thin patchy layer of shell on or near the base of the shell lens had been burnt *in situ*, probably the result of a bush fire. Pottery and bone from this

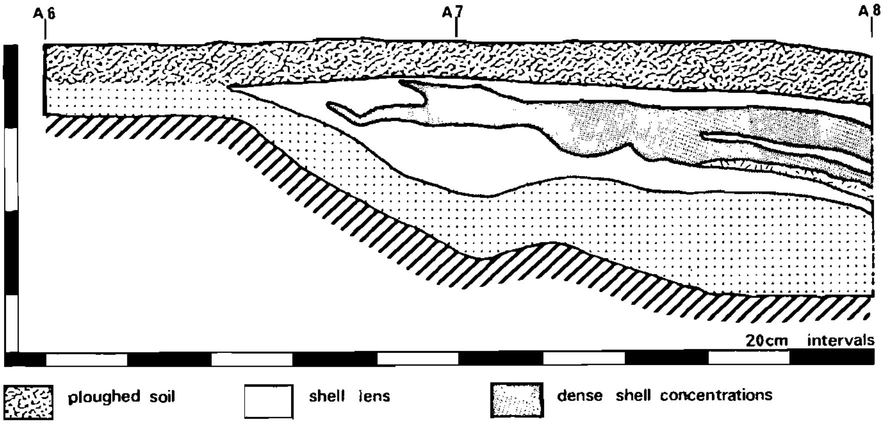

Fig. 3. North–South section through midden A (southern end).

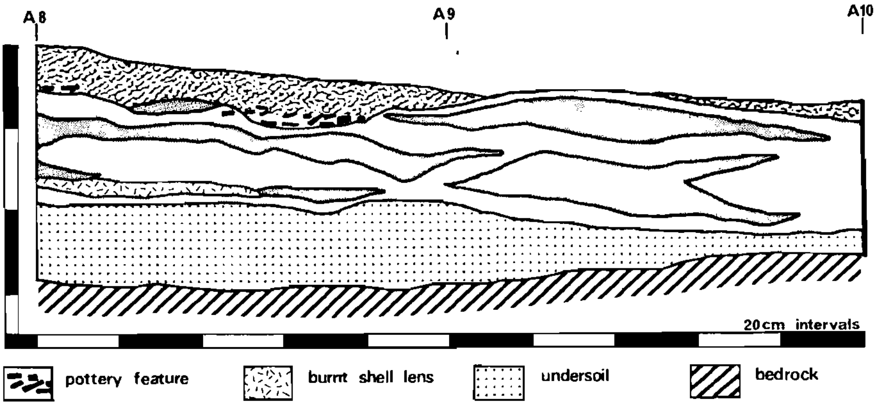

Fig. 4. North–South section through midden A (northern end).

layer showed no variation from the rest of the lens, and the wide horizontal and vertical displacement of bone and pottery within both middens supported the idea that they were the result of a single occupation. In both middens, towards the bottom of the shell lens was a pocket of *Turbo coronatus*, complete with a number of opercula. These could well have been the result of a single meal for a small family. In midden A the faunal remains, whilst not actually forming distinct features, tended to be concentrated in certain areas (Fig. 5) as if dumped regularly in one spot. This midden also contained, on top of the shell lens, a large number of connecting sherds which come from one or two pots (Figs 4, 5 & 11.1) and which may well have been dumped when the site was abandoned, or shortly before this event.

During excavations a number of unsieved bulk samples were taken for analysis of the molluscan content of the middens. In addition, a number of whole shells

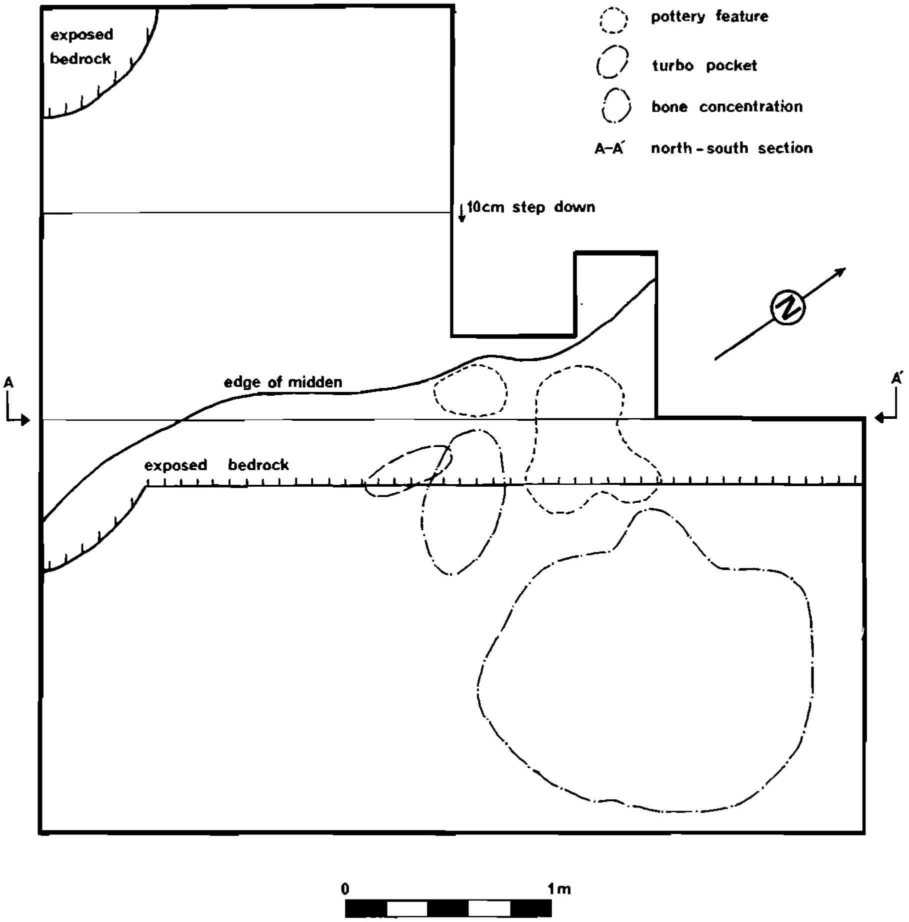

Fig. 5. Excavations in midden A: plan showing features.

were kept for identification purposes and to form a comparative sample. Unfortunately, it was not possible to try flotation, but 16 bulk samples were sieved and weighed, and the shell in eight was sorted and used for analysis. Three sieves were used, and the residue was retained. Material caught in the two larger mesh sieves was found to comprise mainly shell, whilst the small mesh and residual portions were almost entirely soil, with some fine shell dust. Pottery and stone made up a relatively small proportion of the weight, and the bone content was invariably small, averaging less than 0,05% of the total weight of each sample. On this basis, it is estimated the shell content by weight of the middens varied between 40% and 80%, averaging out at a little over 50%. The variation in density was visible during excavation, where it was seen that small patches of the deposit contained much more soil than others. The nature of these patches led us at the time to believe that they were not stratigraphically significant and this has been borne out by the analysis of the other cultural remains. It is worth noting

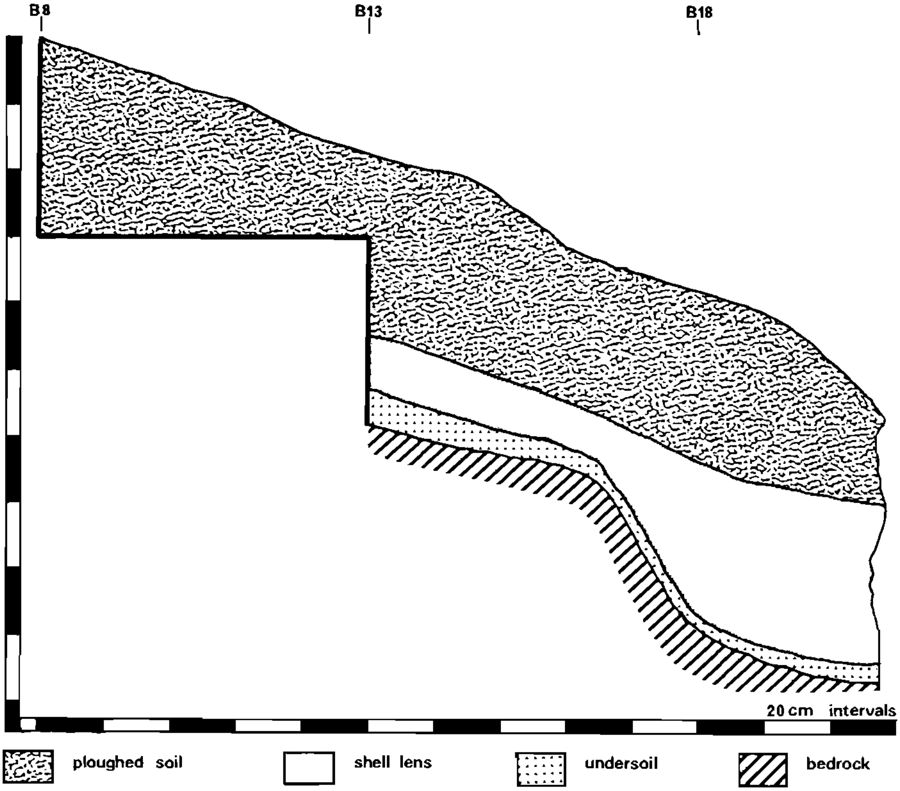

Fig. 6. East–West section through midden B.

that the bone content was higher in the samples where soil made up the largest portion of the total weight.

FAUNAL ANALYSIS

Analysis of the faunal remains was undertaken largely by myself, with identifications being made or confirmed by a number of more experienced faunal analysts. The list of identified species is summarised in Tables 1 and 2. Some attempt was made to match various bones, such as broken teeth or long bones, skull fragments and unfused epiphyses. This revealed the wide spatial displacement mentioned above which led to the treatment of the middens and the fauna from within each as single units, and counts have been made on this basis. The possibility remains, especially with the larger mammals such as the seal, that different parts of the same animal are represented in both middens. This depends on the layout and structure of habitation between the excavated middens and on the food-sharing habits of the inhabitants, neither of which is known.

Mammal bones were sorted into body parts, and counts were taken on twenty different bones, wherever species identification was possible, to obtain for each identified species a minimum number of individuals. A number of diagnostic bones remained unidentified, and it is possible in a few cases that the minimum

TABLE 1.
Mpambanyoni fauna; mammalian, reptilian and avian representation.

		Minimum numbers of individuals		
		Midden A	Midden B	Total
Loxodonta africana	Elephant	—	1 c	1
Bos taurus?	Large Bovid	1 c	—	1
Tragelaphus scriptus	Bushbuck	3 g	1 e	4
Cephalophus monticola	Blue Duiker	9 g	3 d	12
Potamocherus porcus	Bush Pig	2 h	1 i	3
	Medium carnivore	1 d	—	1
Herpestes ichneumon?	Large Mongoose	1 d	—	1
Mungos mungo	Banded Mongoose	3 b	1 b	4
Cercopithecus sp.	Monkey	—	1 c	1
Procavia capensis	Dassie	1 b	—	1
Lepus sp.	Hare	2 b	1 b	3
Thryronomys swinderianus	Cane Rat	5 b	1 c	6
Cryptomys hottentotus	Mole Rat	3 a	—	3
Otomys irroratus	Vlei Rat	3 b	—	3
Otomys laminatus	Vlei Rat	2 b	2 b	4
Praomys natalensis	Mouse	4 b	—	4
Dasymys incomtus	Mouse	3 b	—	3
Aethomys chrysophilus	Mouse	—	1 b	1
Myosorex sp.	Shrew	1 b	—	1
Arctocephalus pusillus	Seal	1 c	1 g	2
Chellonia sp.	Tortoise	+ j	—	+
Serpentes	Snake	1 k	1 k	2
Francolinus sp.	Francolin	1 m	—	1
Aquilidae (*Accipiter* sp.?)	Hawk?	1 e	—	1
Colimbidae?	Pigeon?	1 m	—	1

Counts obtained from:

a—maxilla
b—mandible
c—loose teeth
d—humerus

e—radius
f—ulna
g—tibia
h—metapodials

i—third phalange
j—carapace
k—vertebra
m—tibiotarsus

TABLE 2.
Mpambanyoni fauna; fish representation.

	Minimum numbers of individuals		
	Midden A	Midden B	Total
Clinidae (Klipfish)	20 p	5 p	25
Rhabdosargus tricuspidens (Bream)	8 p	1 p	9
Pachymetopon aeneum (Hottentot)	5 d	2 d	7
Rhabdosargus sarba (Bream)	3 p	—	3
Diplodus sargus (Dassie)	2 p	1 p	3
Liza richardsoni (Haarder)	2 m	1 d	3
Johnius hololepidotus (Kabeljou)	3 m	—	3
Argyrozona argyrozona (Silverfish)	2 p	—	2
Lithognathus mormyrus (Sand Steenbras)	2 d	—	2
Tachysurus feliceps (Sea Barbel)	2 p	—	2
Cymatoceps nasutus (Black Musselcracker)	1 d	—	1
Coracinus capensis (Galjoen)	1 p	—	1
Sparadon durbanensis (White Musselcracker)	—	1 p	1
Unidentified spp.	11 m	2 p	13
Total	62	13	75

Counts taken on: p—premaxillaries; m—maxillaries; d—dentaries. Minimum number of fish represented by most common bone (1st dorsal spine) = 219.

counts could be increased with fuller identification, and that the more tentative identifications could be clearly defined. The identification and counts of the smaller species, mainly rodents, were based entirely on teeth, mandibles and maxillae, which were in any event the most abundant body parts represented. Birds were represented by very few diagnostic bones, while the sample of snakes comprised two vertebrae.

The large bovid represented in midden A is most probably *Bos taurus* and bears more resemblance to this than to the alternative, *Syncerus caffer*, the buffalo. Identification was, however, inconclusive and I have preferred to leave the question open. Similar problems exist with the other tentative identifications. The medium carnivore is cat sized and may be *Felis libyca* and the larger mongoose may be *Herpestes ichneumon*, the Egyptian mongoose, but absolute identification was not possible. Comparative material was not available to identify more closely the monkey *Cercopithecus* sp. from the two loose teeth found.

In general, the evidence suggests that the bovids are mostly young animals. For example, of fourteen *Cephalophus* mandibles, all but two still retain one deciduous premolar, and one of the adults has almost no wear on the permanent teeth. A number of other deciduous teeth were found, and generally there was little wear on adult teeth. In addition, many of the long bones, scapulae and vertebrae from all three bovid sizes had unfused epiphyses.

The fish remains also presented a problem, with insufficient comparative material being available to positively identify several species, some of which are believed to be freshwater fish. Species identification here was confined to maxillaries, premaxillaries and dentaries. Counts were however taken on 21 different bones, and a minimum number of fish present in each excavation was obtained. The first dorsal spine provided the largest count, and this gave a minimum number of 219 individuals, of which 22 come from midden B.

In all, 27 species of mollusc were identified of which 17 or 18 were most probably used for food. With one exception counts of these species indicated that the brown mussel, *Perna perna*, made up over 90% of the sample, rising to nearly 98% in one sample. The exception was a small sample from the top of midden A,

TABLE 3.
Mpambanyoni mulluscan fauna; representation of main food species.

	Midden A		Midden B		Total		Av. Size
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	(mm)
Perna perna	1033	95,9	2144	96,2	3157	96,1	41
Turbo coronatus	21	1,9	32	1,4	53	1,6	13*
Fissurella natalensis	7	0,6	10	0,5	17	0,5	29
Patella miniata/P. concolour/ Cellana capensis	5	0,5	24	1,1	29	0,9	36
Patella granularis	1	0,1	7	0,3	8	0,2	35
Patella barbara	3	0,3	1	0,0	4	0,1	35
Crassostrea cuccullata	2	0,2	11	0,5	13	0,4	—
Achatina granulata	5	0,5	—	—	5	0,2	—
Total	1077	100,0	2209	100,0	3286	100,0	

* Maximum dimension of operculum. All other averages based on maximum dimension of whole shell.

where *Perna perna* formed 86% of the identified food molluscs. Counts of the minimum number of individuals were obtained by counting the apices of gastropods and by siding and counting hinges of the Pelecypods (mussels). A few other species of minor importance averaged between 0,7% and 2,5% of the sample (Table 3). These figures are similar to Hall's (1980) for Enkwazini, on the Zululand coast.

The range in size of specimens of *Perna perna* was considerable, one complete specimen, not from a bulk sample, measuring 146 mm with others being as small as 18 mm. The shell was highly fragmented, however, and very few measurable specimens were obtained.

Of interest was a specimen of *Glycymeris queketti*, a deep-water mussel presumably collected as a shell on the beach, and several fragments of small cowries, *Cypraea* sp., all of which were excavated from the middens.

POTTERY

In all, some 7 000 sherds of pottery were recovered from the site, mainly from the two excavations, which yielded almost 6 000 pieces. In addition, some 650 sherds were taken from a 10 m × 10 m surface collection on site 79/18 which contained similar pottery from a ploughed-up midden. There were 680 rim sherds of which 52 were decorated. The plain body sherds were washed, counted and weighed, while the rim sherds and 54 other decorated pieces (making 106 decorated sherds in all) were kept out for further study. Very few vessels were reconstructable and where this has been done it has been incidental rather than the result of a concerted programme of restoration. The decorated category was too small to attempt a formal classification and ultimately only a few generalised categories were defined. Generally the degree of fragmentation was such that it was very difficult to predict vessel shape with any accuracy, but again an attempt has been made to draw up some broad divisions of shape. For the moment, the analysis remains qualitative rather than quantitative.

The thickness of all rim sherds was measured immediately below the rim, or below any distinct tapering derived from the rim shape. In the excavated sample, it was found that although this measurement varied from 3 mm to over 16 mm, 94,4% of the sample measured between 4 mm and 10 mm, and 54,6% were from 6 mm to 8 mm in thickness. The range of thickness had a normal distribution about a point slightly over 7 mm.

An examination of the temper used showed it to be almost entirely mineral in nature, and what few sherds appeared to have some vegetable inclusions in the form of charcoal still had a predominantly mineral temper. The temper consisted largely of quartz and small black or red granules of an iron rich rock which is believed to be haematite. Occasionally there are a few inclusions of feldspar visible. The presence of rounded and polished quartz and haematite pebbles suggests that the main source for temper was the river, probably with a more angular element taken from the decomposed granite bedrock of the site itself. Grain size tended to increase with increasing wall thickness, although fine temper was common throughout the sample. The haematite became more common in the thicker ware, often forming the dominant component of the coarse-grained temper.

The sample showed a full colour range from complete oxidation to complete reduction, with no correlation with vessel shape, size or decoration. The finish of the outer surface also displayed considerable variation, from well smoothed to very rough, and some sherds appeared to have been burnished. On the whole, thinner ware tended to be better finished, but this was by no means found to be the rule.

The decorated sherds were divided where possible into bowls and jars, then subdivided on the basis of shape. It is probable that some rim sherds classified as jars are in fact similar in shape to those shown in Figs 11.1 & 11.2, which are technically bowls. For this reason, the use of the term globular jars in this paper must be viewed with some caution. Apart from this possible group, the decorated bowls clustered fairly well into three categories.

Group one comprises deep bowls with thin to medium walls (5–7 mm), decorated with rim notching and incised bodies. Two of the four examples of this group have slightly everted rims, one has an internally tapered rim (Fig. 7.1) and the fourth has a straight flattened rim.

Group two includes four small hemispherical bowls. Two have rim notching, and all four have straight rims. This is combined with patterns of crude, deep incisions arranged in discontinuous ranks at an angle to the rim (Fig. 7.4). In one vessel, this is complemented with a pattern of stamping, apparently impressed with a hollow reed or bone implement (Figs 7.5–7.8). This vessel has a plain rim, while another has a notched rim but a plain body.

The third and least well-defined group consists of four or five open bowls with a broad incision running around the circumference of the lip (Fig. 7.2). Since the bodies of these bowls have not been identified with the rim sherds, it is impossible to assertain their original depth, and it is even possible that this group forms a variant of group one.

Fig. 7.3 illustrates a bowl which fits into none of the above categories, with a distinct shoulder added to reduce the rim diameter of the vessel. In common with other decorated bowls it displays rim notching, which in this case is apparently the only decoration on the bowl.

The jars proved more difficult to group, with a wide variety of decoration being present. Three broad categories have been defined, but a large number of sherds give no evidence of vessel shape and may be either jars or bowls.

Group one consists of jars with a band of neat parallel broadline incision directly below the rim. Vessels in this group are probably necked, although in most cases the necks are not clearly defined or the join with the body is missing. Twenty-one sherds from at least fourteen vessels fall into this group (Figs 8.1 & 8.2). Thirteen sherds show signs of a burnished ochre slip, and one has a graphite burnish and only two lines of decoration. Wall thickness is thin to medium, and rims are straight or externally thickened. A probable variant member of this group has a band of dentate stamping separating two bands of broadline incision (Fig. 8.3). The width and spacing of the incisions in this group vary but are neater and more regular than other forms of incision used as decoration.

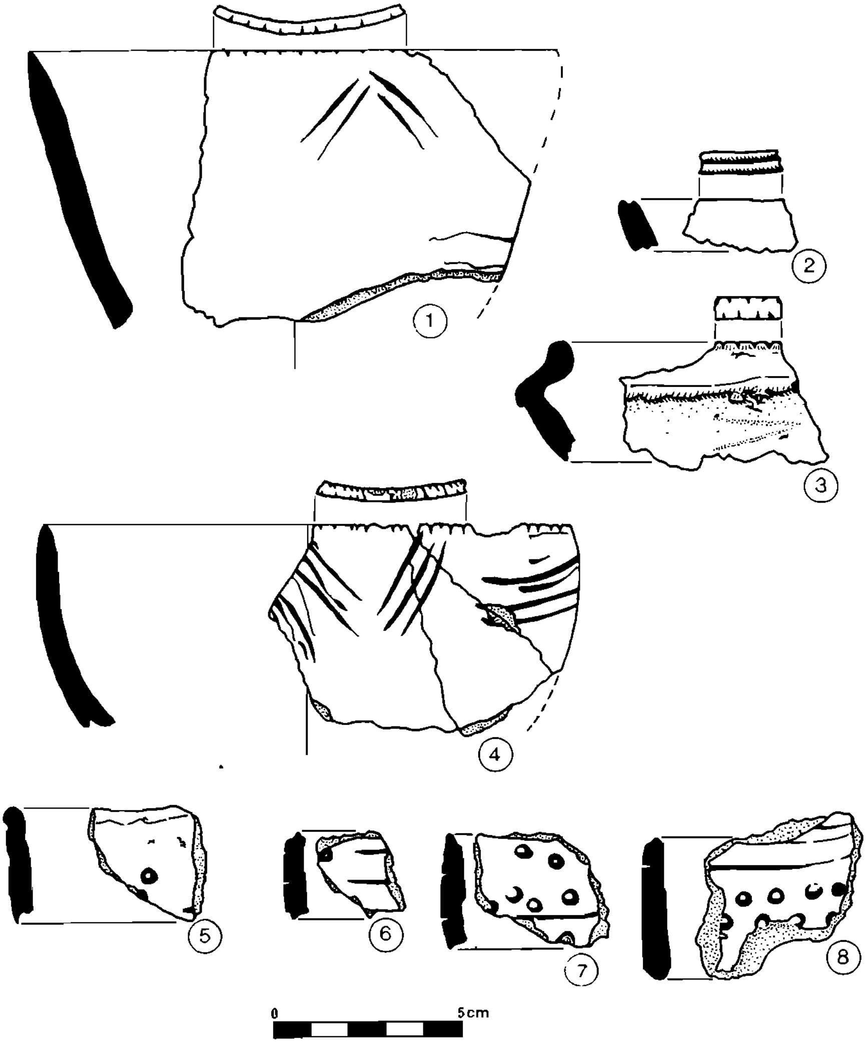

Fig. 7. Decorated bowls from Mpambanyoni. 1—Deep bowl with external rim notching. 2—Group three bowl with incised rim. 3—Shouldered bowl from surface collection. 4—Hemispherical bowl with external and internal rim notching. 5—Sherds from incised and stamped hemispherical bowl.

The second group is made up of five sherds from different vessels, thicker in cross-section than the previous group and coming from neckless, unburnished jars. The body decoration consists of shallow, discontinuous incisions which appear to have been made by dragging a small twig or reed lightly across the surface. Rims are slightly everted, with flattening in two cases (Fig. 8.5), and one sherd has crude external notching on the rim (Fig. 8.6).

The remainder of the incised sherds give little indication of vessel shape, and vary in decoration from crude, roughly parallel deep incisions (Fig. 8.4) to a band

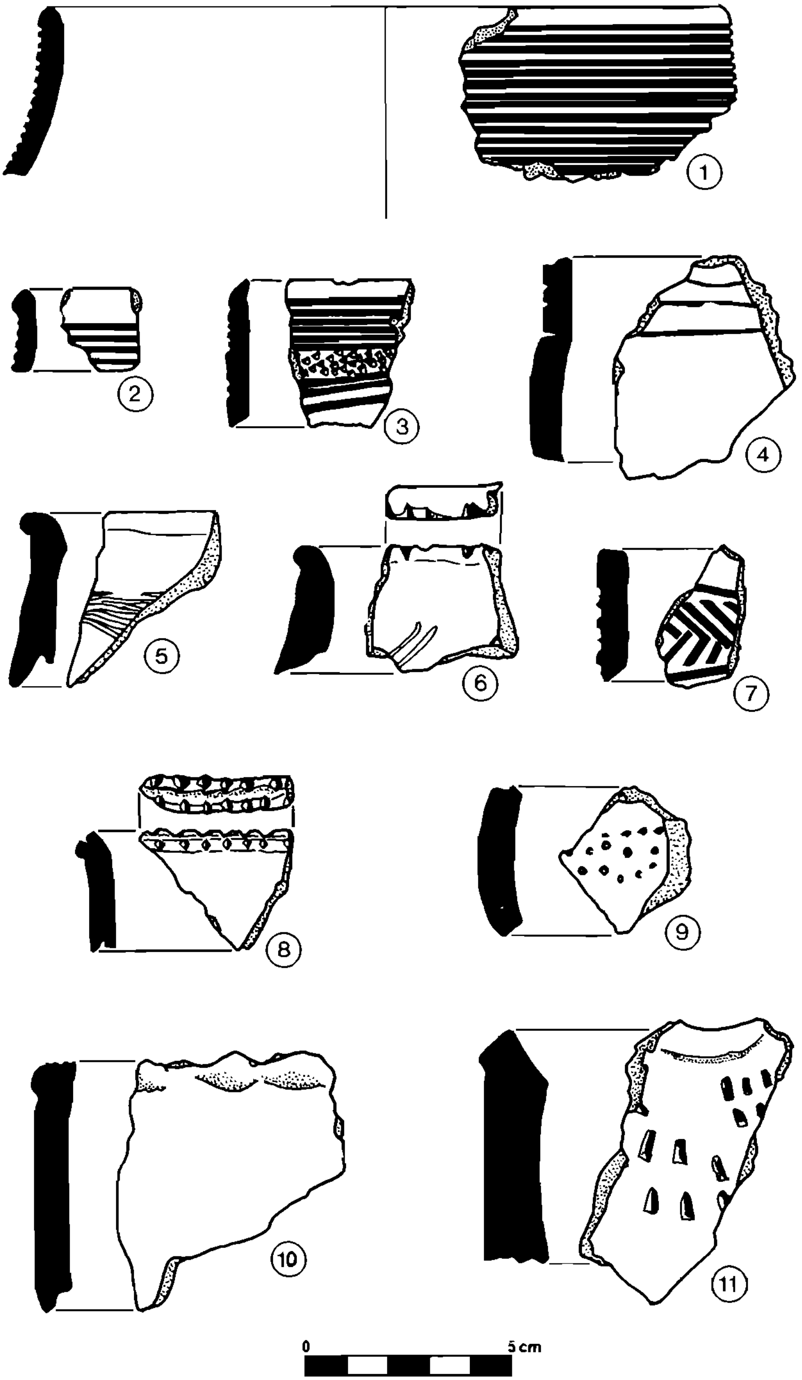

Fig. 8. Decorated sherds from Mpambanyoni. 1–2—Group one jars with parallel broadline incision on the neck. 3—Group one variant with dentate stamping. 4—Necked jar with deep incisions. 5—Group two vessel with 'reed-brushed' decoration. 6—'Reed-brushed' vessel with externally notched rim. 7—Sherd with broadline chevron pattern. 8—Sherd with rim incision and subsequent notching. 9—Sherd with punctate decoration. 10—Externally applied band forming 'bumps'. 11—Sherd with rectangular punctates, possibly a spout of some sort.

of neat broadline chevrons on a sherd which probably had a burnished ochre slip (Fig. 8.7).

The third group includes all vessels in which the only body decoration is an applied colour. Two sherds have a combination of rim notching and a wide, v-shaped incision around the lip (Fig. 8.8). Three sherds have a graphite burnish, and three more have a burnished ochre slip. The two sherds with notched rims, one having a graphite burnish and the other an ochre finish, are from globular jars. The others are vertical or near vertical sided or are of indeterminate shape. Wall thickness and rim shape are varied. Also in this group are seven sherds from three vessels, medium to thick in cross-section with straight flattened rims and near vertical sides, having a thin but distinct white finish. Some other sherds appeared to display this same decoration, but as it was not clear whether this was deliberate decoration or the result of powdered shell being pressed on to the surface in the deposit, they were not included in the decorated category. It is even possible that the white finish on the deliberately coloured sherds is a paint made from powdered shell, but confirmation of the medium used must await chemical analysis.

The rest of the decorated pottery consists of a number of body sherds with punctate or applied decoration, a rim sherd with an unusual shape and rectangular punctates below the rim (Fig. 8.11), a large applied boss and two sherds which may be legs or handles. Three of the body sherds are decorated with an uneven band of small round punctates, giving a stippled effect (Fig. 8.9). One

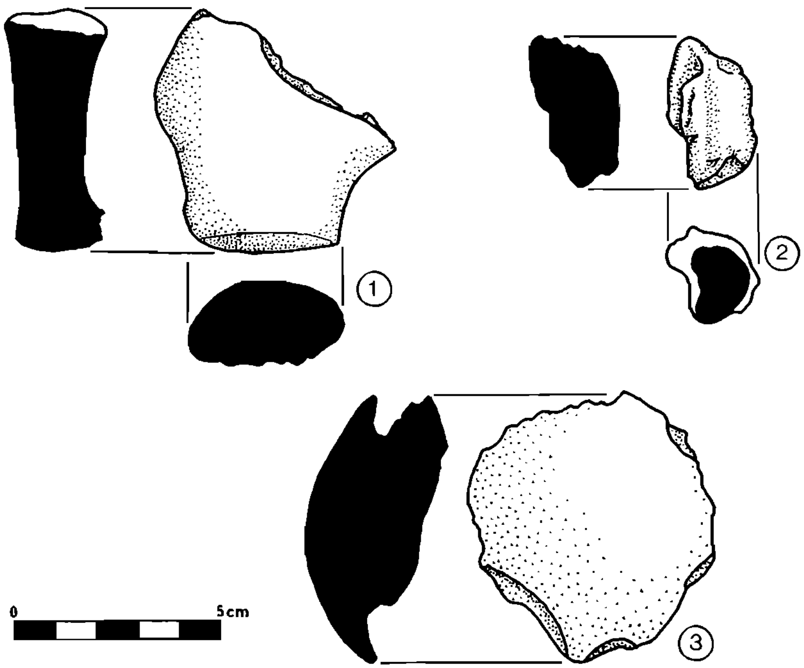

Fig. 9. Excavated sherds from Mpambanyoni: undecorated but forming special features on vessels. 1 & 2—Legs or handles from vessels or possibly from figurines. 3—Large boss.

of these shows that the instrument used was hollow, while the other two were decorated with a harder, solid and slightly pointed instrument. Three other sherds have an externally applied band, depressed at irregular intervals to give the appearance of a line of uneven bumps (Fig. 8.10). The thickness of the vessel to which the boss was added suggests that the boss may have been near the base of the vessel (Fig. 9.3). This sherd, along with the two 'legs' (Figs 9.1 & 9.2) and the rim sherd mentioned above are enigmatic, as both their positions on vessels and their exact function remain completely unknown.

Only twenty decorated sherds were recovered from the surface collection at 79/18, but these appear to be comparable to those described above. Two ochre burnished sherds with a band of parallel broadline incision show a distinct neck (Fig. 10.3) and support the presence of this as a defining feature of group one jars. Two large adjoining sherds from a vertical sided jar (Fig. 10.2) fit into the second category of jars and demonstrate the irregularity of the light brushing characteristic of this group. This group may be more common in both sites as a sherd showing only one such line would be difficult to differentiate from the rough finish of many of the pieces. One adiagnostic sherd has a small circular depression with a ridge through the centre, probably made by pinching the clay between two fingers (Fig. 10.4). Another has a raised bump which appears to be shaped from the wall of the pot, and not externally applied. The effect, however, is much the same as on the sherds described above with applied decoration. Two

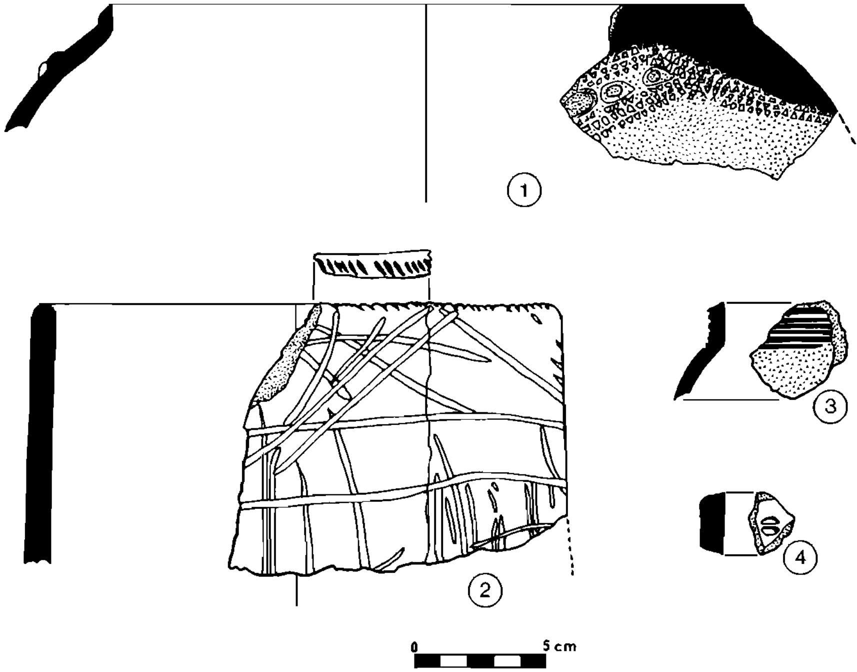

Fig. 10. Decorated Pottery from 79/18 surface collection. 1—Jar with graphite and ochre burnish, dentate stamping and applied bosses. 2—'Reed-brushed' jar with transverse rim notching. 3—Group one jar, necked, with parallel broadline incision and ochre burnish. 4—Sherd displaying pinch-mark.

interesting and unusual sherds complete this collection. The first is a globular jar, with both graphite and ochre burnish separated by an uneven band of dentate stamping, made by a comb with four or five triangular teeth. At one point this band separates around a row of at least three small, externally applied bosses, one of which has been lost (Fig. 10.1). The second sherd has a plain finish but is interesting because it is the flat base of a small bowl or jar with a maximum external diameter of about 15 cm, some 6.5–7 cm above the base.

The bulk of the pottery from Mpambanyoni was undecorated, but because it included a number of large sherds and partially reconstructable vessels, it was used to define more clearly the range of vessel shapes and correlations between

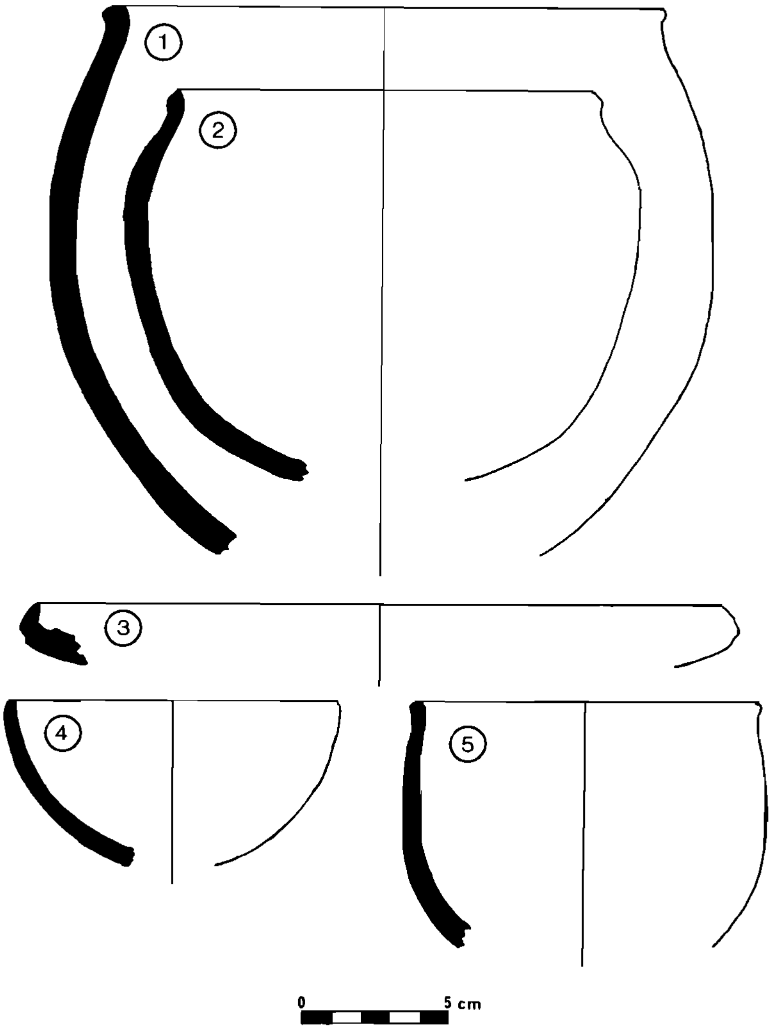

Fig. 11. Bowl shapes from Mpambanyoni 1 & 2—Indeterminate bowl/jars. 3—Shallow dish. 4—small hemispherical bowl. 5—small group one bowl.

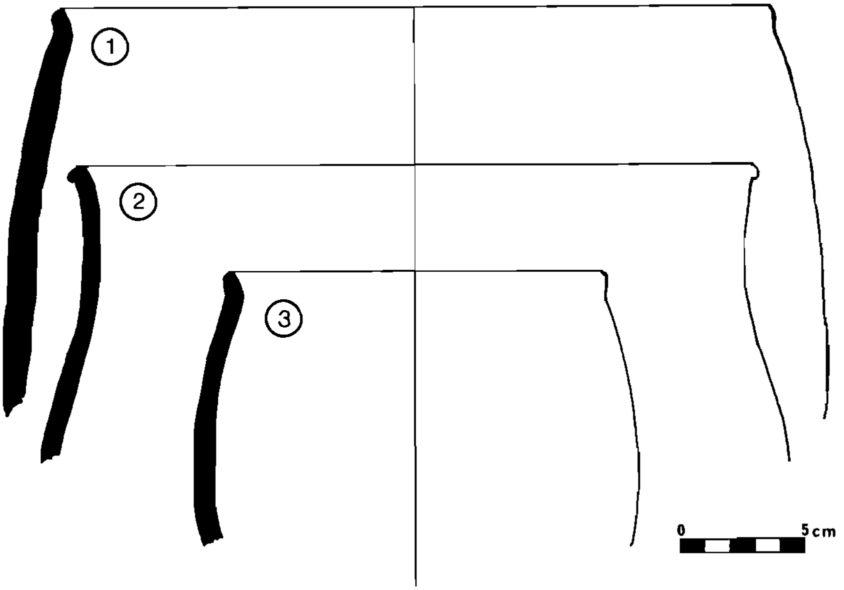

Fig. 12. Jar shapes from Mpambanyoni.

these shapes, rim form and cross-sectional thickness. The sherds used for this were rim sherds from the excavated middens.

Bowls tended to have flattened rims which were straight or externally thickened, with a wall thickness of less than 10 mm. The most common form was the deep bowl mentioned above (group one of the decorated bowls), with rim diameters varying from 12 to 24 cm. Walls were thin to medium in cross-section (Fig. 11.5). Small hemispherical bowls were uncommon, with thin walls and straight or flattened rims (Fig. 11.4). The thicker bowls appeared to be more open, and two sherds come from what appears to be a wide, shallow dish (Fig. 11.3).

Jars, where these could be identified as such, took two forms, having either near-vertical sides or being globular in shape. A few of the globular jars had short, ill-defined necks, and most had straight or everted rims, sometimes partially flattened. Jars with near-vertical sides form the most common category, and are generally large and thick walled. Some examples are shown in Fig. 12.

OTHER ARTEFACTS AND MANUPORTS

A badly corroded iron point, in four pieces, was recovered from the soil underlying the shell lens in midden A. Because of its condition, it is impossible to measure accurately its length, but it was probably 12–14 cm long and is 2,5 cm at the widest point, near the hafted end. It is not possible to see whether or not the point originally had a tang for hafting, as this end is extremely corroded. Evidence for the local manufacture of iron was provided by four small pieces of slag, excavated or collected on the surface and the presence of a number of heavy, iron-rich pieces of stone some of which may have been used as an ore.

Two small, circular shell beads, one of which is believed to have been made from the land snail *Achatina granulata*, were also found, one in midden A and the other from the surface near midden B.

Sixteen pieces of sandstone and shale bearing signs of rubbing, polish and striations, or pitting from being struck, were taken either from the middens or the surface. At least four of these, three of sandstone and one of shale, were evidently lower grindstones. A few, while they showed definite utilisation, could not be more accurately classified. A further stone, a river pebble of Dwyka tillite, showed possible signs of utilisation. In addition a creamy-yellow fine-grained sandstone or mudstone flake, looking rather as if it belonged in the Middle Stone Age, was found on the surface. This could be a later, European introduction, dropped on the hilltop, or it may have been brought in as a curiosity. It shows no sign of utilisation, and is certainly not a product of the occupation of the site.

A large number of manuports were seen on the site during excavation. Some of these were shale or sandstone river pebbles, but the majority were shingles of a type commonly available on the beach near Scottburgh, mostly derived from the conglomerate boulders found there. These latter show no signs of utilisation or of having been in a fire, and were probably collected off the rocks in amongst the clumps of *Perna perna*.

DISCUSSION

The cultural remains show that Mpambanyoni was occupied by people manufacturing and using iron implements and pottery. The latter appears similar to that originally classed as NC2 (Schofield, 1948) and now known to represent the Late Iron Age along the Natal coast. They almost certainly lived a settled life, practised agriculture and probably herded cattle. However, hunting, fishing and gathering of shellfish, mainly the brown mussel *Perna perna*, must have made an important contribution to their diet. Meat weights have not been calculated, but the most common animals are the bushbuck *Tragelaphus scriptus*, the blue duiker *Cephalophus monticola*, the bush pig *Potamocherus porcus* and the cane rat *Thryronomys swinderianus*. Of interest is the presence of a large number of fresh-water and oceanic fishes in the middens, as a taboo exists today on the eating of fish among the coastal Nguni.

Three samples of charcoal from the two middens, were submitted to Dr J. C. Vogel of the National Physical Research Laboratory of the CSIR and dates from these indicate that the site was occupied around the beginning of the second millennium A.D. (Table 4). This date invites a comparison with the site of Blackburn, near Umhlanga Rocks and some 80 km north of Mpambanyoni, where a date of 900 ± 40 B.P. (Pta-162) was obtained from excavations by Davies (1971). This site was first described by Beater & Maud (1963) and their

TABLE 4.
Mpambanyoni radiocarbon dates.

Pta-2528	Mpambanyoni B 8	(Midden B)	930 ± 50 yrs. B.P.	(ad 1 020 ± 50)
Pta-2527	Mpambanyoni A 5	(Midden A)	980 ± 50 yrs. B.P.	(ad 970 ± 50)
Pta-2534	Mpambanyoni A19	(Midden A)	885 ± 50 yrs. B.P.	(ad 1 065 ± 50)

description of the site and its location tallies remarkably well with the situation of Mpambanyoni. They also list some of the molluscan and mammalian fauna they identified, which again appears to compare well with the faunal list given above. It seems, however, that the comment by Davies (1971: 177) that 'sea fishing must have been beyond their powers' can no longer be held to be reasonable in the light of evidence from Mpambanyoni. The pottery from Blackburn, described by both Beater & Maud (1963) and Davies (1971), also compares closely with the descriptions given above, and in the light of the evidence given here, it seems reasonable to suggest that the two sites form parts of the same ceramic tradition, representing the early phase of the Late Iron Age.

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